

When Fire and Ice Meet

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Summary: A conversation that takes place between Yukishiro Tomoe of Battousai's past and Kamiya Kaoru of Kenshin's future. What *does* happen when Fire and Ice meet? (One-shot)

When Fire and Ice Meet

Author's note: I don't know why I keep writing fics about T-o-m-o-e when I don't even *like* her. shakes head There must be something wrong with me. This idea was supposed to be the fic I'd write for the Tomoe Challenge, but Winter Sun came up... anyway, I've always wanted to write a conversation between Tomoe and Kaoru-chan. This fic was written for my dear, dear friend, Ia, sometimes known as Tasha or as Aoi in a different, virtual reality. I'm fire. She's ice.

>
--OOC and minor niggling mistakes ^^ alert--

>
Written May 2000

>
This fic may contain...

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>for the manga, Revenge arc....

>When Fire and Ice Meet
a Tomoe-Kaoru fic

>by Mia Sereno

> She needed a new kimono.

> The thought, ordinary and unremarkable as it might be, wormed its way into the increasing worry and fear that dominated Kaoru's mind. She let it stay for a few moments, then pushed it away as she had pushed all other thoughts like it away. But then she paused in the very act of putting it aside and decided that she would demand a kimono from Enishi later.

> That minor dilemma resolved, she looked out the window and tried to divert herself from the overwhelming, dark emotions that filled her.

> The sky was overcast, a leaden gray that concealed the sun behind it in an eternal moment of timelessness. Wild birds screeched as they winged their ways over the horizon and soared up into the featureless

gray. Kaoru let herself be lost in the unconscious dance of flight, as if the birds carried her fear and worry and uncertainty with them, up, up, into the sky.

> "Kaoru-san."

> Kaoru had heard no sound, no indication of movement behind her.

How, then--? She turned.

> And froze.

> A woman stood there before her, a woman with dark, dark hair pulled back into an extended ponytail and skin almost snow-white in its paleness. Her face was beautiful, certainly, but this beauty was not the kind of brilliant light, radiant and fully alive; instead, it was somehow more subdued, as if sorrow, instead of concealing her beauty, had draped a misty veil over her face that softened it into luminosity. She was dressed in a kimono without any kind of pattern, and a faint glow seemed to suffuse her whole being.

> But what had made Kaoru stiffen in bewildered disbelief was that she was standing several inches off the ground.

> The woman gracefully inclined her head and settled down gently on the wooden floor. "Forgive me if I startled you," she began. Her voice was very quiet, infinite regret overshadowing it. "Please let me introduce myself. I am Yukishiro Tomoe, sometime known as Himura Tomoe."

> A momentary apprehension filled Kaoru's heart at being seen thus by she who had once been Kenshin's... wife, then disappeared as she answered, "I... am pleased to meet you, Tomoe-san. But..."

> "I am dead?" An emotion almost akin to sadness crossed Tomoe's delicate face. "Yes, you are correct. But the dead do not disappear from the world of the living entirely, and sometimes they may reach out to those who still live."

> Kaoru nodded, not trusting herself to answer. What could she have answered to that, anyway?

> Insecurity stole into her heart with every moment she saw the older woman. Tomoe was all she wasn't... graceful, elegant, beautiful -- a lady. And she could cook! Looking at her made Kaoru feel like a little child who had no right to the word 'lady', and she felt frustration threatening to fill her eyes with tears.

> "First of all, I would like to apologize for the... trouble my brother has brought upon you."

> "Enishi?"

> Tomoe inclined her head. "He didn't -- doesn't -- understand why I died."

> "And so he wants to take his revenge on Kenshin... and I." Kaoru couldn't keep the anger out of her voice, and wondered if Tomoe would react to it. But the other woman, icily calm, merely inclined her head again.

> "My brother is wrong," she said. "He always has been, since I... died, and I cannot count the number of times I have wished I could tell him otherwise."

> Hope surged into her. Tomoe *could* talk to people still alive. If she could convince Enishi to... "Why don't you, then?"

> But that hope was shattered by the slow shaking of Tomoe's dark head. "Enishi would not see me," the dead woman answered softly, her face still undisturbed by any emotion save that of accepted sorrow. "His mind has been blinded by revenge, by anger, by hate, and the only Tomoe he sees is the one he wants to. The one who approves, who smiles at whatever he does." She sighed, a breath of cold air that lingered in the room. "I have seen his soul, and though he thinks that what he does is out of love for me..." and her words trailed off, into some unimaginable abyss in the world of the dead.

> Silence, and Kaoru had the chilling feeling that she was alone in

the room.

> "Why have you come, then?" she asked finally.

> Tomoe spread her snowy, delicately-shaped hands. "I have come to tell you that... *he* is coming."

> Kaoru's heart leaped with joy. There was no question about who *he* was. "When?" she asked, relief and expectation alternating in her voice.

> "Soon."

> The frustration and anger that had seethed inside Kaoru since her captivity -- frustration that she could be so helpless, that she had been used as a pawn in a game to snare Kenshin and deal him the revenge Enishi had long felt he deserved -- vanished instantly, like mist in the sun. But the worry remained, as did the fear though it was changed into that for another. Kenshin would be forced to fight, and... "How do you know?"

> "I... convinced him to come here." The sharp intake of breath that followed those words did not escape Tomoe's attention, and she added, "please understand, Kaoru-san, that when he found you had been abducted by my brother, his reaction..." Tomoe sighed again.

> Blue eyes widened, then dropped their gaze. "What happened?"

> "He was... incapacitated by guilt," the older woman said finally. "And grief."

> Kaoru felt tears -- for Kenshin, for her, for the opportunities lost, for joy, for sadness -- welling up in her eyes and sparkling there, diamonds in a sea of deep, brilliant blue. "He shouldn't have blamed himself for what happened," she murmured.

> "Aa." An almost emotional pause. "He cares for you. Very much."

> In spite of... everything? she thought to herself. Even though I may have disappointed him all this time? Even though I'm not like you? "Does he know how I feel?" Then, why am I asking a question like this of a woman I don't even know?

> Because I'm frightened, she answered herself. Because I don't believe I'll measure up to his expectations. Because I need your approval.

> Instead of answering, Tomoe said quietly, "he believes that he is unworthy of you."

> "But he isn't!"

> "Indeed." The other woman's face was completely emotionless, but Kaoru felt even more keenly that it was *she* who was unworthy of Kenshin, and not the other way around. After being with someone like Tomoe... "And you are wrong if you think that *you* are unworthy of him."

> Plucking at her robe's sleeve -- and stopping when the thought came to her that the action betrayed a nervousness she had been trying to conceal ever since Tomoe appeared -- Kaoru looked up at the other woman and shook her head slightly. "I--"

> "Kaoru-san." And Tomoe held up a hand. "Do not underestimate yourself. He loves you. *You*."

> Being told that by someone who truly knew Kenshin was revelatory, as if the doubt that had always obscured her vision and had been clearing, little by little, had been blown away by a winter breeze, cold and yet very, almost painfully, truthful. Kenshin loves me! she thought, feeling that she had always known, and had just been prevented from realizing it by her fears. It made her want to sing. Then Tomoe spoke again.

> "I have returned to ask a favor of you, as well."

> "I'll try to fulfill it if I can, Tomoe-san."

> For a moment -- just a moment -- the icy calm and absence of

emotion in Tomoe's face wavered, and she smiled. It was only a faint smile, tinged with the sorrow that was part of Tomoe herself, and if Kaoru had not been looking at her so closely she wouldn't have seen it at all. "Love him."

> "I already do," Kaoru answered quickly.

> But Tomoe would not be satisfied with only that for an answer.

"Love him enough to ask him to stay, enough to believe in him even when everything seems hopeless. Love him enough to let him forget the past and find happiness in you."

> Tomoe gazed at the girl's face with expressionless eyes before she continued. "You need each other. You deserve each other. Please, Kaoru-san... he deserves you, deserves to be happy."

> It was then that Kaoru suddenly saw, as if she had seen directly into Tomoe's thoughts, why the dead woman had come back, only to say those words, infinitely fragile and precious, like living tears. The clarity of the realization almost blinded her. "Yes," the shade whispered sorrowfully in answer to Kaoru's thoughts. "He couldn't be happy with me, not for a very long time. There was always the war, always death. Always who I was and what we were." Tomoe made a gesture that was lost in the filmy illusion of her kimono's sleeves.

"But now he has you. Do not let him lose you, or think that he doesn't deserve you."

> The younger woman nodded, if only slightly.

> "Kaoru-san... He loves you for who you are and not for any other reason."

> "I... understand." Yes, she did. Now. It was all so beautifully simple, when she thought about it looking through the eyes Tomoe's words had given her. She wondered that she had not seen it before, when it had all seemed so... difficult... when she had doubted herself and been beset by fears and insecurities.

> Now, she knew. And no longer doubted.

> Kaoru's eyes widened as she saw Tomoe's form starting to waver and grow faint. "Tomoe-san... why?" she asked, half-afraid that Tomoe would leave before she could answer something she had been wondering about since hearing the dead woman's first words.

> As she gradually vanished from the land of the living to return to the world of spirits and shades where she belonged, Tomoe gracefully inclined her head once more and answered, very softly, "I loved him as well, Kaoru-san."

> And then she was gone.

> Leaving Kaoru. A Kaoru who looked the same as always, but with new resolve and determination in her heart and a song soaring through her spirit. When Kenshin came...! She drew a long, happy sigh and sat down on her futon to wait.

>---Owari--- <p><p>

End
file.